

Read all about it: new focus on bubs

REBECCA BAKER

A NEW taskforce will address a concerning lag in the development and school readiness of young South Australians compared with children interstate and overseas.

The Early Years Taskforce, to be headed by former federal Labor minister for early childhood Kate Ellis, will focus on children aged three and under.

Australian Early Development Census data shows SA children are more likely to fall behind in the five measured domains – physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication and general knowledge – compared to the national average.

“We cannot sit back and allow SA children to continue to fall behind children in the rest of the country before they have even started

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school,” said Ms Ellis, who has retired from politics.

“(The data) also shows that while other states are reducing numbers of vulnerable children, SA’s rate continues to increase.

“We know that 90 per cent of a child’s brain development occurs by the time they are five years old.”

Ms Ellis, appointed by lead agency Raising Literacy Australia as part of the \$500,000 initiative, said working to increase play, reading and other interactions with children in their early years was a priority.

She said key to her role was finding out the programs on offer in SA and ensuring good co-ordination and promotion



Education Minister John Gardner and Early Years Taskforce leader Kate Ellis with three-year-old Edward and babies Lexi, 4 months, and Austin, 9 months, at Raising Literacy Australia in Norwood. Picture: Matt Loxton

of these as part of a broader campaign. “I will work with any government, any agency and any organisation to unite in our efforts to give SA children the best start in life and the strongest foundations for future success,” she said.

Ms Ellis said the issues

were not confined to low socio-economic areas of the state, with many time-poor parents in higher socio-economic households also struggling to give the best help to their children.

Technology and exposure to screen time were also rais-

ing new challenges for parents, Ms Ellis said. “It is reminding all parents of the simple things they can do with (children), such as sing together and read books,” she said.

SA Education Minister John Gardner said the new taskforce formed part of the

government’s 10-year early-learning strategy. “I am grateful to Kate for her enthusiasm to support Raising Literacy Australia ... she is well-known for her passion about improving early-childhood education and supporting our earliest learners,” he said.

Improving development for little ones is child’s play

KATE ELLIS

SOUTH Australian children are behind the national average before they even start school.

We know this because we measure it. Australian Early Development Census data shows SA children are more likely to be vulnerable on all five of the measured developmental domains than the national average.

It also shows that while other states are reducing numbers of vulnerable children, SA’s rate continues to

increase. It is bad and getting worse. SA children are largely invisible until they enter the schooling system.

I have a dear friend who had her first child in Melbourne before returning home to SA, where she had two more children.

She commented to me how different the levels of support and information provided to her were.

The evidence supports this. While young children are entitled to development screening checks at a range of ages, the take-up rate in

SA is dismal compared to other states.

Parents are unaware of what is available or believe it is not required unless there is an obvious problem.

Parenting can be exhausting. Dealing with nappies, tantrums, meals, bath time and bed time can be gruelling.

If we don’t recognise the importance of speech, books, songs and play, they fall off the to-do list in place of “the essentials”. But it is essential.

We have lacked a consistent message to parents and a

broad public campaign about the importance of development in the early years.

Talking about neuroscience can seem complicated. It doesn’t need to be. It is as simple as the fact that 90 per cent of brain development occurs by the age of five.

This is the time we lay the foundations for all future learning.

The brain develops through use. We do that through talking to our babies, reading to them, playing with them, singing with them.

Spike in vermin complaints

BEN CAMERON

REPORTS of vermin in eastern suburbs businesses have almost doubled over the past two financial years, with an industry expert blaming Covid-19 restrictions and a lack of regular inspections.

Eastern Health Authority’s annual report shows reports of rats, mice, pigeons and insects rose from 65 in 2018-19 to 119 in 2020-21.

Pest Inspect Australia’s Chris Ansell said since Covid-19 had struck, he had noticed strong numbers of vermin in areas with a high number of eateries and other food service businesses, including the East End of the CBD.

“Routine (pest control) services have been interrupted, missed or ceased and foot traffic has lessened, making it safer for vermin to spread out,” Mr Ansell said.

The 119 reports last financial year was well up on the 88 in 2019-20.

The EHA was contacted for comment. It previously said the vast majority of complaints related to “domestic premises”.

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Overseas students returning

CHRIS RUSSELL

RETURNING international students will land in Sydney from December, while South Australia is still yet to set a date for its plan.

Some 500 fully vaccinated students will arrive on chartered flights in Sydney and undergo two weeks quarantine in retrofitted accommodation in inner-city Redfern.

There would be no cost to taxpayers, NSW deputy premier John Barilaro said.

SA has in-principle agreement from the federal government for a trial of students to return and quarantine at Flight Training Adelaide at Parafield Airport.

In July, Premier Steven Marshall said he hoped the first students would arrive in SA in August, but public safety was the priority.

No firm date has been set. “The (SA) state government remains committed to welcoming back international students to the state as soon as possible and when it is safe to do so,” a spokesman said.